

Statement of Geri O'Sullivan

Submitted March 14, 2013

I would like to thank the members of this committee for giving me the opportunity to submit a written statement regarding my position on pending gun control legislation. As the mother of a Sandy Hook third-grader, I demand that you pass common-sense, comprehensive gun control legislation, including an immediate ban on assault weapons.

Friday, December 14, 2012 was the most harrowing day of my life. Sometime after 9:30 that morning, I got a disturbing automated message that due to a shooting, Newtown schools were in lock-down. I cannot describe the sick feeling I got in my stomach when I heard those words. Immediately I began calling neighbors to see if anyone had additional information. Finally, a neighbor with a son in the high school was able to get a text. She told me it wasn't good - a teacher at Sandy Hook had been shot. For an instant, my heart stopped beating and my only thought was to get to the school. As I drove, my husband called to tell me the school was blocked off and to go straight to the firehouse. I parked on someone's lawn and joined a large group of equally distraught parents in a desperate run to the firehouse.

I remember the relief I felt when I saw my son with my husband; I never hugged him so tight. I also remember the anxious looks on other parents' faces whose children were "unaccounted for". It is a look no parent would ever forget. And I remember hearing that the principal, Dawn Hoch sprung was dead, and thinking that this was going to be really bad. That was the understatement of the year.

When I think about what happened in our safe little corner of the world, I am deeply saddened. My heart breaks every time I see a parent in town who lost a child. I grieve when I hear a neighbor or friend tell me their children are suffering from PTSD, not to mention the loss of friends and schoolmates. And I worry about my own son, who thankfully was at the back of the building and spared the worst, but still asks, "Mommy, does screaming count as someone's last words to me?" My son's last memory of his beloved principal, Dawn Hochsprung, should NOT be of her screaming over the school intercom as some lunatic with an assault rifle cuts her down.

But when I think that Sandy Hook was not the first such massacre - that this has happened before, in other towns, in other states - I am outraged. What is wrong with us? Why is it legal, not to mention extremely easy, to purchase military style assault weapons? Is this what the Second Amendment is all about? With all due respect, I submit that is a ludicrous interpretation of our Founding Fathers' intent. Yes, the Constitution affords us rights, but the only inalienable ones are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. All other rights come with responsibilities and can be restricted if it is in the best interest of our nation to do so. We as a rational society do this all the time. I would argue that there is no right as valued as our First Amendment right to free speech, yet we have laws restricting speech to reasonable time, place and manner. You are not allowed to yell "fire" in a crowded movie theater on the grounds that someone may get hurt. How is it then that someone can take a legally purchased semi-automatic weapon into a movie theater and kill innocent people? This would be funny if it wasn't just so damn tragic.

It IS reasonable to ban assault weapons and the time and place is now. While I understand that there are many factors that come into play with horrific tragedies such as Columbine, Aurora, and Sandy Hook, there is no denying that but for the easy access to military assault weapons like a Bushmaster rifle, a lot of innocent people would not have died. Assault weapons are THE common denominator in all these tragedies and in my opinion, the easiest one to address. Military assault weapons must be banned. I ask you: how do you tell a mom that her child is the last child to die because of a stupid policy driven by special interests with money? What would you tell her? I ask you to think about this as you consider your vote on an assault weapons ban.

Thank you again for allowing me to submit my testimony. I hope and pray you do the right thing.